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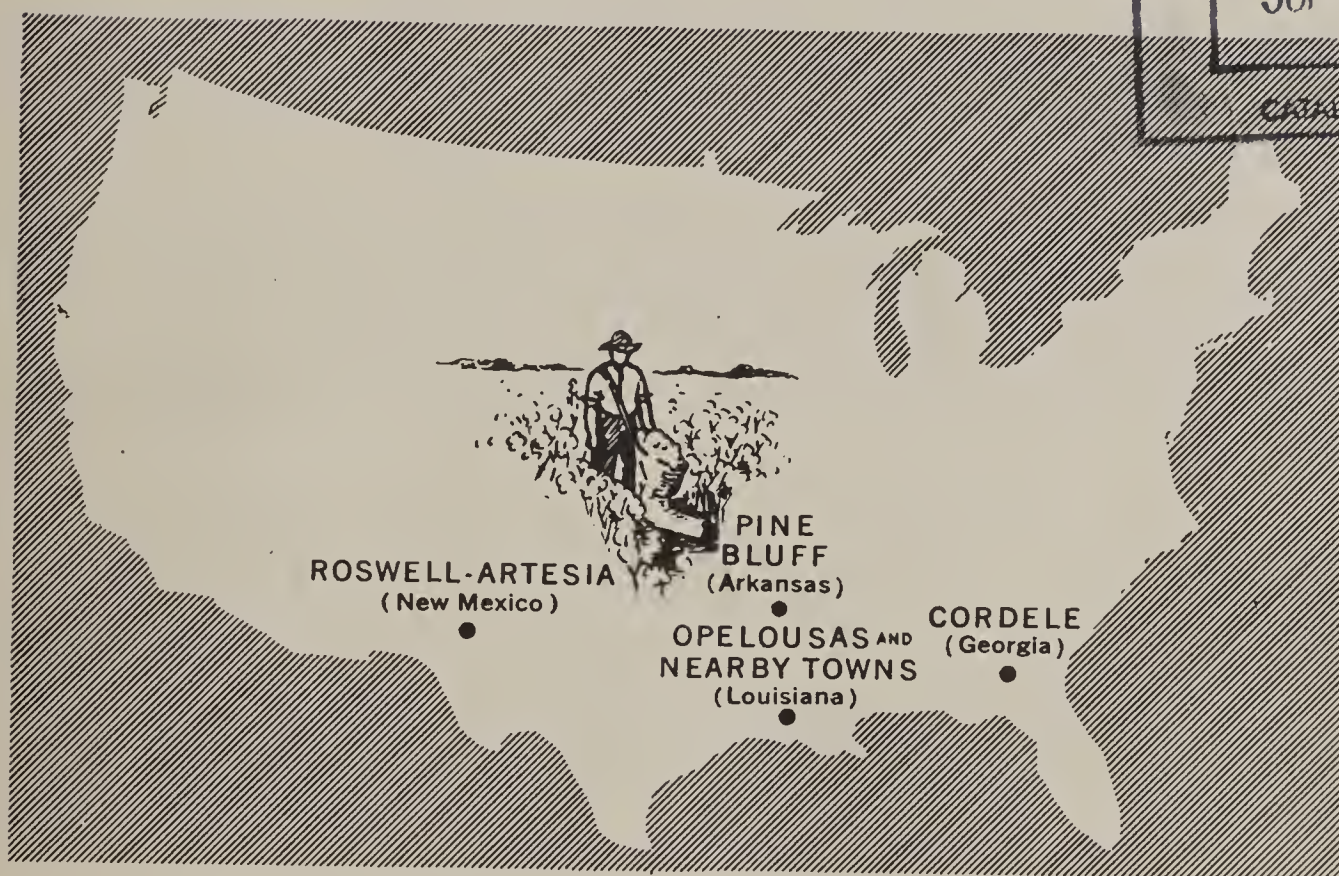
Unemployment and Partial Employment *of* HIRED FARM WORKERS *in Four Areas*

(A SUMMARY REPORT)

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

AND

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
BUREAU OF EMPLOYMENT SECURITY

Washington, D. C.

April 1953

FOREWORD

Farm manpower problems have mounted in intensity since the outbreak of hostilities in Korea. These problems are sometimes cast in a framework of shortages, either of seasonal or year-round workers. While these shortages have occurred in some areas, local underemployment sometimes exists in other farming areas because of the seasonal character of employment. To utilize most effectively all domestic manpower resources, more information is needed about the characteristics of farm workers and the nature of their attachment to the labor force.

Because of their common interest in problems of farm labor, the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and the Bureau of Employment Security together planned and conducted a survey of unemployment and partial employment of hired farm workers in four areas in the spring of 1952.

Although these Bureaus have cooperated in many ways in the past, this is the first of several major projects of a research nature in which both agencies are participating. The information secured has been utilized in the administrative planning and operations of the farm labor program of the Bureau of Employment Security. The findings are now being published in the belief that they may be of interest and value to others concerned with the agricultural labor situation.

In the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, the Division of Farm Population and Rural Life and the Division of Special Farm Statistics participated in carrying out the study. The offices in the Bureau of Employment Security participating were the Farm Labor Analysis Section of the Division of Reports and Analysis and the Program Division of the Farm Placement Service. Field survey operations were conducted under the direction of the State Agricultural Statisticians in each of the States involved — Georgia, Arkansas, Louisiana, and New Mexico — in consultation with the State and local Employment Service offices.

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UNEMPLOYMENT AND PARTIAL EMPLOYMENT OF HIRED FARM WORKERS IN FOUR AREAS

May 1951 — May 1952

A Summary Report

CONTENTS

Purpose of the Survey	1
Summary	1
Description of the Areas.....	2
Characteristics of Workers Surveyed	4
Attachment to the Labor Force	6
Patterns of Employment	9
Unemployment	12
Availability for Off-Season Employment	14
Methodology of the Survey.....	17

UNEMPLOYMENT AND PARTIAL EMPLOYMENT OF HIRED FARM WORKERS IN FOUR AREAS

May 1951 — May 1952

Cordele, Georgia
Pine Bluff, Arkansas
Opelousas, Ville Platte, Eunice,
Washington, and several smaller
towns and villages of St. Landry
and Evangeline Parishes in
Louisiana
Roswell and Artesia, New Mexico

PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY

Since the middle of 1950, as defense preparations have gone forward in the United States, agriculture has been called upon for progressively higher levels of production. Meanwhile, one of the essential instruments of farm production, the farm labor force, has continued to decline. The result has been a widening public interest in farm manpower problems and an intensification of efforts to achieve better utilization of the services of the remaining force of workers.

This problem may be viewed from several standpoints. The farmer is concerned with the risk factor involved in committing his resources to increase production, without having reasonable assurance of an adequate labor supply when it is needed. The farm laborer is confronted with the need for employment which, in turn, is frequently complicated by seasonal fluctuations in labor demand. The broader public interest is concerned with the optimum use of manpower throughout the economy and in the armed services. Information about the current farm manpower situation is a basic need in connection with each of these interests.

This study was undertaken cooperatively by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and the Bureau of Employment Security to obtain information helpful to government agencies concerned with programs to provide employment for American farm workers. This information would be particularly relevant to efforts made to assure a supply of seasonal farm workers for essential harvest and cultivating work in agriculture. In recent years the domestic farm labor force has been supplemented with workers from Mexico, Canada, and the British West Indies brought into the United States under government auspices. The question has been raised by the Subcommittee on Low-Income Families of the Congressional Joint Committee on the Economic Report as to whether domestic farm workers are fully utilized. The President's Commission on Migratory Labor, in its 1951 report, also described underemployment and unemployment of domestic farm workers. In 1952, the Senate Subcommittee on Labor-Management Relations of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare held extensive hearings which pointed to the need for more study of the two-headed problem in agriculture of seasonal unemployment and partial employment on the one hand and acute labor shortages elsewhere.

The main purpose of this study, then, was to determine how widespread seasonal unemployment is among the group of people who normally supplement the farm labor force, at what seasons of the year it occurs, what these people do when not actually employed in agriculture, their willingness to migrate to fill in their employment with work elsewhere, and related data. It is intended that the results of the study may be translated into specific plans for better utilization of domestic labor resources.

SUMMARY

The results of this study will be published in more detailed reports for each of the four areas studied. This report is of a summary nature showing some of the data

concerning the characteristics of the group of workers surveyed, their status in the farm labor force, patterns of employment and unemployment, and willingness to accept farm and nonfarm jobs during off-seasons. The survey was made in May 1952 and most of the data relate to the 12 months preceding that date.

The four areas in which the study was conducted are Cordele, Georgia; Pine Bluff, Arkansas; several cities, towns, and villages in St. Landry and Evangeline Parishes in Louisiana; and Roswell and Artesia, New Mexico. In each of these localities, cotton is a dominant agricultural crop. Needs for hand labor in cotton are so acute during periods of cultivation and harvest of cotton, that many persons living in small towns in the area, who may not be regular farm workers, are drawn into the farm labor force for varying lengths of time for supplementary work. The movement of these persons in and out of the labor force is determined largely by the seasonal requirements of the cotton crop and to some extent by other seasonal agricultural activities.

It was among such seasonal hired farm workers residing in towns and villages that the study was made. Because all persons in each sample household who performed any farm work for wages during the year were considered for purposes of this study to be members of the farm labor force, heads of households and other primary workers were in the minority. Most of the farm workers in the sample were wives, sons, or daughters of primary workers, with little education or experience in nonfarm occupations.

The length of time during the year that this group spent in farm work varied from a few days to 10 months or more. Usually farm employment in two or more seasons during the year aggregated less than four months per worker.

When not employed as seasonal farm workers, some had nonfarm jobs as domestic service workers, packing house operatives, or in other unskilled occupations. Most of the women returned to their household duties during off-season periods, and young people withdrew from the labor force to return to school.

Actual unemployment, in the usually accepted sense of the term, was difficult to measure among this group of supplementary workers with a marginal attachment to the labor force. The concept of unemployment involves two things: the person is either actively seeking work, or if not looking for work, it is because of a knowledge or belief that no work is available in the area. In each of the four areas studied, the degree of unemployment varied considerably according to the personal characteristics of the workers. Adult males who were most continuously in the labor force generally reported the most unemployment; of these about half or more were without jobs and seeking work at sometime during the year in three of the four survey areas. These seasons of unemployment were closely identified with lulls in crop activity. In periods of peak activity, on the other hand, practically no unemployment was reported.

In spite of the seasonal peaks and troughs of employment, workers interviewed were reluctant to consider non-local employment. Except in New Mexico, where the study was made among a group more accustomed to migration, few were willing to entertain the thought of working away from home. The surveys indicate that although there is a large reserve for local work both on and off the farm, relatively few of these people were available for work outside of their home communities.

DESCRIPTION OF THE AREAS

The areas surveyed were selected because they were known to contain concentrations of seasonal farm workers who lived in population centers of various sizes. Similarly, each area was believed to be affected by relatively high rates of unemployment during certain periods of the year. The survey areas were: Cordele, Georgia; Pine Bluff, Arkansas; Opelousas, Ville Platte, Eunice, Washington, and several smaller towns and villages of St. Landry and Evangeline Parishes, in Louisiana; and Roswell and Artesia in New Mexico. Details of sampling methods are contained in the section on methodology. A brief description of each area follows:

Pine Bluff, Arkansas

Pine Bluff, with about 40,000 inhabitants, is the largest city in Jefferson County, Arkansas. Slightly more than half of the county's 75,000 people are nonwhite.

Cotton, corn, lespedeza, and rice are all grown in Jefferson County, but cotton is by far the most important crop, particularly in terms of seasonal labor requirements. At the height of the cotton picking season, about 3,500 workers are needed in addition to family and year-round labor. About half of this number come from outside the State, most of them Mexican Nationals, brought in under an international agreement for work under contract to individual growers.

Nonfarm employment opportunities in Pine Bluff have increased in recent years. Pay scales in industry and construction have attracted many people from the farms.

Cordele, Georgia

Cordele, a city of 10,000 people, is in Crisp County in the southern part of Georgia. The county's population is about equally divided between whites and nonwhites. The pool of farm labor living in Cordele and working in agriculture on a day-haul basis is composed almost exclusively of Negroes.

In terms of acreage, corn, peanuts, cotton, and vegetables are the principal crops in this area. Labor demand for these crops is highly seasonal, especially for cotton, and to a lesser extent, for peanuts. Until recently, local and nearby sources were sufficient to meet these needs. The movement of on-farm laborers to towns and, in many cases, entirely out of the area, has increased the demand for off-farm seasonal workers. In 1951, Mexican Nationals were employed for the first time in the Cordele area for cotton picking.

Labor is largely interchangeable between farm and certain types of nonfarm work, and there are employment opportunities in both types of work. At the time of the survey, general economic conditions were good and nonfarm employment was comparatively high.

Opelousas and Nearby Towns, Louisiana

The area studied in Louisiana is in the south central part of the State, centering around Opelousas. All of the urban places and selected villages in St. Landry and Evangeline Parishes were included in the survey. These two parishes have a total population of about 110,000.

Cotton, corn, rice, soybeans, and sweetpotatoes are the principal crops in this area in terms of acreage. Cotton and sweetpotatoes have the highest seasonal labor requirements.

All the seasonal farm laborers in the area are from the local nonwhite population. The Opelousas area serves as a labor supply source for other points in the State.

There are several seasonal food processing activities in the area which provide temporary employment to some farm workers. There also are other nonfarm industries such as lumber mills, a meat packing plant, and transportation and construction, which provide some seasonal employment. In spite of this, at the time of the survey, unemployment was prevalent in the area.

Roswell — Artesia, New Mexico

The New Mexico survey area is located in the southeastern part of the State. Roswell, with 30,000 people, is the county seat of Chaves County, and Artesia, with a population of 9,000, is about 30 miles south of Roswell, in Eddy County.

Agriculture is a major source of employment in this area, and cotton is the foremost crop. Alfalfa, small grains, row crops, truck farming, and cattle raising are also important.

Most of the farm workers in the area are of Latin-American descent. There is also a small group of Negroes and an even smaller group of Anglo-Americans. In peak labor seasons, such as cotton picking time, more than half of the farm labor in the area is supplied by Mexican Nationals.

In slack labor seasons, some New Mexico workers migrate to other areas. Others find odd jobs in the area in custodial work, service establishments, or dairies. The major nonfarm activities in the area are oil, lumbering, and potash production.

CHARACTERISTICS OF WORKERS SURVEYED

In the cities and towns in the survey areas, a random selection was made of about one-third of the households in sections where farm workers were known to live. Since the focus of the study was on farm wage workers who live in cities, towns or villages but work on farms for varying lengths of time during the active seasons of the year, worker families living on farms or in the open county, where most regular farm workers live, were not interviewed. Workers included in the survey, therefore, were not representative of all farm wage workers in the survey areas. Since the characteristics of workers have an effect on their participation in the working force, it is important in understanding the patterns of employment of these workers to know something of their sex, age, education, and experience in nonfarm work.

There were 3,204 persons living in the survey households, and about half of them had done some work for wages in the past year. This proportion differed among the individual areas, ranging from a low of 38 percent in the New Mexico area to a high of 58 percent in the Georgia area. On the average, there were 4.6 persons of all ages in each survey household as compared with an average of 3.2 persons in all households in the United States. The number of persons who participated in the labor force at some time during the year was high, averaging 2.3 persons per household.

Farm — Nonfarm Experience

Of the 1,589 workers surveyed, about 4 in every 5 had done some farm wage work during the preceding 12 months while 1 in 5 had done only nonfarm work (table 1). These farm wage workers form the group described in this report. About 66 percent of them did only farm work; the remainder were engaged in both farm and nonfarm work. Twelve percent did mostly farm work and 22 percent did more nonfarm than farm work. In the Georgia and Louisiana areas, a comparatively high proportion of the workers did nonfarm work, while more of the workers in Arkansas and New Mexico were identified mainly or altogether with farm work.

Table 1—Percentage distribution of farm workers in farm labor households surveyed in selected localities, by type of work done in preceding 12 months, May 1952

Locality	All workers	Workers who did nonfarm work only	Farm workers			
			Total	Farm work only	Farm and nonfarm	
					Mostly farm work	Mostly nonfarm work
	Number	Number	Number	Percent	Percent	Percent
All workers	1,589	330	1,259	66	12	22
Survey area of:						
Arkansas	435	86	349	75	11	14
Georgia	480	126	354	63	13	24
Louisiana	493	102	391	61	8	31
New Mexico	181	16	165	63	21	16

Age and Sex

Twenty-seven percent of the farm workers in this study were 14-19 years of age (table 2). Thirty-eight percent of them were under 20 years of age. Many of these young people attended school for most of the year, but joined the farm labor force in peak seasons. School-age youth were particularly numerous in the Georgia and Louisiana sample areas where 43 and 42 percent, respectively, of the farm workers surveyed were under 20 years of age.

The study revealed that most of the total group of workers were housewives, female family heads, or sons and daughters of workers. Seven hundred and fifty-three, or 60 percent of the 1,259 farm workers, were females. In Arkansas, the households surveyed had the highest proportion of female farm workers with 70 percent; those in Georgia and Louisiana were next with 66 and 56 percent respectively. The New Mexico area was the exception with females representing only 35 percent of the 165 farm workers in the survey.

Table 2.—Distribution of farm workers in farm laborer households surveyed in selected localities, by age and sex, May 1952

Sex and age	Farm workers				
	Total	Survey area of:			
		Arkansas	Georgia	Louisiana	New Mexico
	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number
Both sexes	1,259	349	354	391	165
Male	506	105	122	171	108
Female	753	244	232	220	57
Percentage Distribution					
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Both sexes	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Under 14	10.4	5.7	18.9	10.2	2.4
14 - 19	27.1	23.2	24.0	32.2	29.7
20 - 34	21.2	22.1	19.2	18.9	29.1
35 - 54	29.4	35.0	26.9	27.9	26.7
55 - 64	6.5	6.6	4.8	6.9	9.1
65 and over	5.4	7.4	6.2	3.9	3.0
Male	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Under 14	15.6	8.6	33.6	17.0	--
14 - 19	33.2	40.0	27.1	36.8	27.8
20 - 34	17.6	12.4	13.9	15.8	29.6
35 - 54	20.2	23.8	13.1	17.5	28.7
55 - 64	7.1	4.7	4.9	8.8	9.3
65 and over	6.3	10.5	7.4	4.1	4.6
Female	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Under 14	6.9	4.5	11.2	5.0	7.0
14 - 19	23.0	16.0	22.4	28.6	33.3
20 - 34	23.6	26.2	22.0	21.4	28.1
35 - 54	35.6	39.8	34.1	35.9	22.8
55 - 64	6.1	7.4	4.7	5.5	8.8
65 and over	4.8	6.1	5.6	3.6	--

Education and Experience

Educational levels of these workers were markedly lower than those of all persons beyond school age in their respective states. ^{1/} The median years of school completed by farm workers 18 years of age and over was 3.5 in the Louisiana area, 4.2 in New Mexico, 5.6 in Georgia, and 7.3 in Arkansas (table 3). In all four areas male workers on the average had completed fewer years of school than had females.

Table 3.—Median years of school completed by farm workers 18 years of age and over in farm laborer households surveyed in selected localities, by type of work and sex of worker, May 1952

Sex of worker	Survey area of:			
	Arkansas	Georgia	Louisiana	New Mexico
	<u>Median</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Median</u>
Both sexes	7.3	5.6	3.5	4.2
Males	6.2	5.3	3.4	4.1
Females	7.7	5.6	3.6	4.5

Of the entire group of farm workers, only 7 percent reported having some experience or training other than that of their usual work (table 4). Most of these workers reported their experience as domestic household and service workers, or as operatives in non-agricultural processing industries. The amount of nonfarm experience was related to work opportunities outside of agriculture as shown by the fact that in Cordele, Georgia, the proportion of farm wage workers with nonfarm work experience was significantly higher than in other areas.

Table 4.—Distribution of farm wage workers in farm laborer households surveyed in selected localities, by training or experience other than that of usual work, May 1952

Training or experience	Farm workers				
	Total	Survey area of:			
		Arkansas	Georgia	Louisiana	New Mexico
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Percent</u>
All farm workers	100	100	100	100	100
No experience other than usual work	90	96	87	93	81
With some experience	7	3	12	6	5
Experience not reported	3	1	<u>1/</u>	1	14

^{1/} Less than 0.5 percent.

ATTACHMENT TO THE LABOR FORCE

Of the 1,259 farm workers studied, one in five may be classified as a regularly employed person aggregating more than 10 months of employment in the year at both farm and nonfarm jobs. At the other extreme, six percent were casual workers who engaged in work for pay only a few weeks during the year. Nearly three-fourths of the group, therefore, were seasonal workers whose total employment during the year ranged between 1 and 10 months. Although workers selected for study were farm workers by definition, one-third combined nonfarm and farm work. Workers with both farm and nonfarm work experience during the year preceding May 1952 generally reported longer periods of employment than those engaged in farm work only (table 5).

^{1/} Data from the Bureau of the Census are not strictly comparable with these data; however, for persons 25 years of age and over the median years of school completed were as follows: Arkansas, 8.3; Georgia 7.8; Louisiana, 7.6; New Mexico, 9.3 (Source: Bureau of the Census, 1950 Census Population Report, Reprint of Vol. II, Chapter B.)

Table 5.—Distribution of farm wage workers in farm laborer households surveyed in selected localities by major type of work and by number of weeks of employment in year preceding May 1952

Number weeks of employment	Farm workers							
	Total		Farm work only		Farm and nonfarm work			
					Mostly farm		Mostly nonfarm	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
All farm workers	1,259	100	825	100	154	100	280	100
1 - 4 weeks	72	6	69	8	2	1	1	1/
5 - 16 weeks	457	36	423	51	17	11	17	6
17 - 40 weeks	449	36	303	37	72	47	74	26
Over 40 weeks	281	22	30	4	63	41	188	67

1/ Less than 0.5 percent.

Because the survey included only workers living in towns and cities, very few of the workers — only two percent — were regularly employed at farm work only. Most of the workers studied were short-time farm workers with one to four months of agricultural employment in the year preceding the time of interview (table 6). In the survey areas of New Mexico and Arkansas, workers reported longer periods of farm employment than in the other two locations. Male heads of families who were also farm workers tended to have longer periods of crop work than other household members during the period studied.

Table 6.—Distribution of farm wage workers in farm-laborer households surveyed in selected localities, by duration 1/ of farm work done in past year, and by relationship to head of household, year preceding May 1952

Locality and relationship to head	Farm workers				
	Total	Casual	Short-term seasonal	Long-term seasonal	Regular
	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number
All farm workers	1,259	124	658	445	32
Survey area of:					
Arkansas	349	14	120	213	2
Male heads	46	4	15	26	1
Female heads and wives of heads	161	8	51	101	1
Others	142	2	54	86	0
Georgia	354	45	206	95	8
Male heads	41	4	15	17	5
Female heads and wives of heads	132	15	75	41	1
Others	181	26	116	37	2
Louisiana	391	53	296	39	3
Male heads	61	10	38	12	1
Female heads and wives of heads	130	18	99	13	0
Others	200	25	159	14	2
New Mexico	165	12	36	98	19
Male heads	63	4	7	40	12
Female heads and wives of heads	30	4	8	18	0
Others	72	4	21	40	7

1/ Casual work, 1-4 weeks of farm work; short-term seasonal work, 5-16 weeks; long-term seasonal work, 17-40 weeks; regular work, over 40 weeks.

When not engaged in farm work, what did these workers do? The answer to this question depends on the characteristics of the worker. Male heads of families usually divided their time between farm work and nonfarm work. Female heads of families and wives of male heads reported that they devoted themselves to housework for the most part when not employed at farm work. Young children of farm worker families usually spent the greater part of their nonworking time at school (table 7).

Table 7.—Average time distribution of farm workers in farm-laborer households, by relationship to head of household, year preceding May 1952

Survey area and relationship to head of household ^{2/}	Farm workers	Average man-weeks spent in:					
		Farm wage work	Nonfarm work	Unemployment	Keeping house	Attending school	Other
	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number
<u>Arkansas</u>	349	19	6	3	13	6	1
Male heads	46	18	17	5	1	2	5
Female heads and wives of heads	161	19	4	1	23	1/	1
Sons, 16 and over	27	19	5	4	--	20	1/
Daughters, 16 and over	45	20	6	4	3	14	1
Children under 16	38	20	1/	2	4	22	1/
Others	32	22	8	3	11	3	1
<u>Georgia</u>	354	14	9	1	10	12	2
Male heads	41	22	20	2	1	--	3
Female heads and wives of heads	132	14	12	1	20	1/	1
Sons, 16 and over	17	12	24	1	--	11	1/
Daughters, 16 and over	31	17	6	2	8	13	2
Children under 16	87	10	1/	1	1	32	4
Others	46	12	8	1	9	15	2
<u>Louisiana</u>	391	10	10	5	9	12	2
Male heads	61	13	19	10	1	2	3
Female heads and wives of heads	130	11	13	3	20	--	1
Sons, 16 and over	49	14	9	10	1/	14	1
Daughters, 16 and over	45	10	10	4	10	14	1/
Children under 16	89	8	1/	4	2	34	1/
Others	17	9	7	1	7	22	2
<u>New Mexico</u>	165	26	7	5	6	3	1
Male heads	63	30	11	6	--	1/	1
Female heads and wives of heads	30	18	5	1	23	0	1
Sons, 16 and over	29	27	8	8	--	3	2
Daughters, 16 and over	17	28	1/	4	12	2	2
Children under 16	16	20	2	3	3	20	0
Others	10	25	6	9	0	7	1

1/ Less than 0.5 weeks.

2/ Includes sons-in-law and daughters-in-law.

PATTERNS OF EMPLOYMENT

The employment patterns of farm workers studied in all four areas are molded by the seasonal character of the crops, particularly cotton. This is illustrated by the charts on the following pages. ^{1/} These show how employment in nonfarm work complements farm activities to some extent in all four areas, but most of the seasonal farm workers studied withdrew from the labor force to resume nonwork activities during off-seasons. In viewing these charts, it is important to keep in mind that the workers in the survey do not represent a cross-section of all hired farm employment in any of the four areas studied. For example, the chart shows that there was more employment of these seasonal wage workers in the late spring than in the fall among the group studied in Arkansas. Other information about the area shows a higher total employment of hired farm workers in the fall. The reason is that many nonlocal workers come into the area during the cotton picking season and add to the total number of persons working on farms during the cotton harvest. Since the study was made among local workers only, the chart for Pine Bluff does not reflect this large non-local increase in the farm labor force.

At no time during the year were all workers in the survey group fully employed in the Pine Bluff area. During the cotton chopping season in May and June as many as 92 percent were in the labor force, and 86 percent were engaged in farm work (chart 1). A second peak occurred in the cotton harvest period between September and November. Nonagricultural industries in the area, although affording regular employment in laboring occupations to large numbers of people, fail to provide temporary work to fill in the year for seasonal agricultural work. Thus, unemployment is high between the peak seasons in cotton.

Corn, peanuts, cotton, and vegetables are all grown in the area around Cordele, Georgia. Labor demands for these crops are highly seasonal. Cotton, in particular, requires substantial numbers of seasonal workers in the early summer for chopping and hoeing activities and many more in August and September for picking (chart 2). Because of the relative diversity of crops and employment opportunities in nonfarm work, unemployment between seasons is not as severe in Cordele as in Pine Bluff. As in other areas surveyed, relatively large numbers of the farm wage workers here are housewives and school-age youth who drop out of the labor force during seasonal lulls.

Largest requirements for seasonal hands in the parishes of Evangeline and St. Landry, Louisiana, are for cotton and sweetpotatoes with employment reaching its peak in August, September, and part of October. During these months some shifting of workers from nonfarm jobs to farm work is evident. During other months of the year some of these seasonal workers are employed in food processing, domestic service work, and other farm and nonfarm activities, but unemployment is widely prevalent for six months of the year (chart 3).

The size of the labor force surveyed in Artesia and Roswell, New Mexico, varied less throughout the year than those in the other areas surveyed. This is because many workers left the area for seasonal employment elsewhere between cultivation and harvesting of cotton in the months of July and August (chart 4). Unlike the other three areas where wives and children made up the greater part of the workers studied, most of the workers surveyed in this area were adult males. Consequently, the proportion who remained in the labor force all year round was higher than in the other three areas and unemployment affected a higher percentage during the winter lull.

^{1/} The percentage figures shown in these charts relate to the total number of persons who worked for wages on farms at any time during the year and not to the current labor force during any specific week.

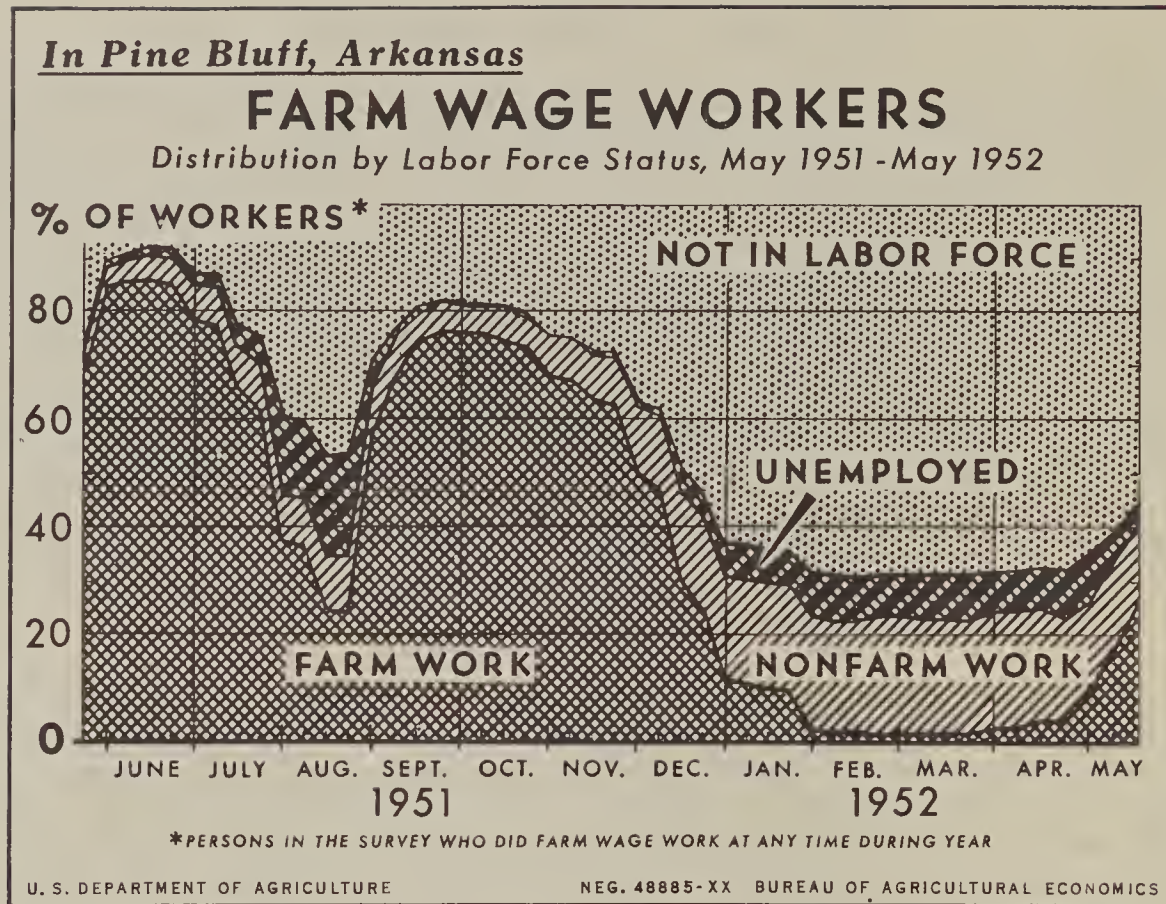


Chart 1

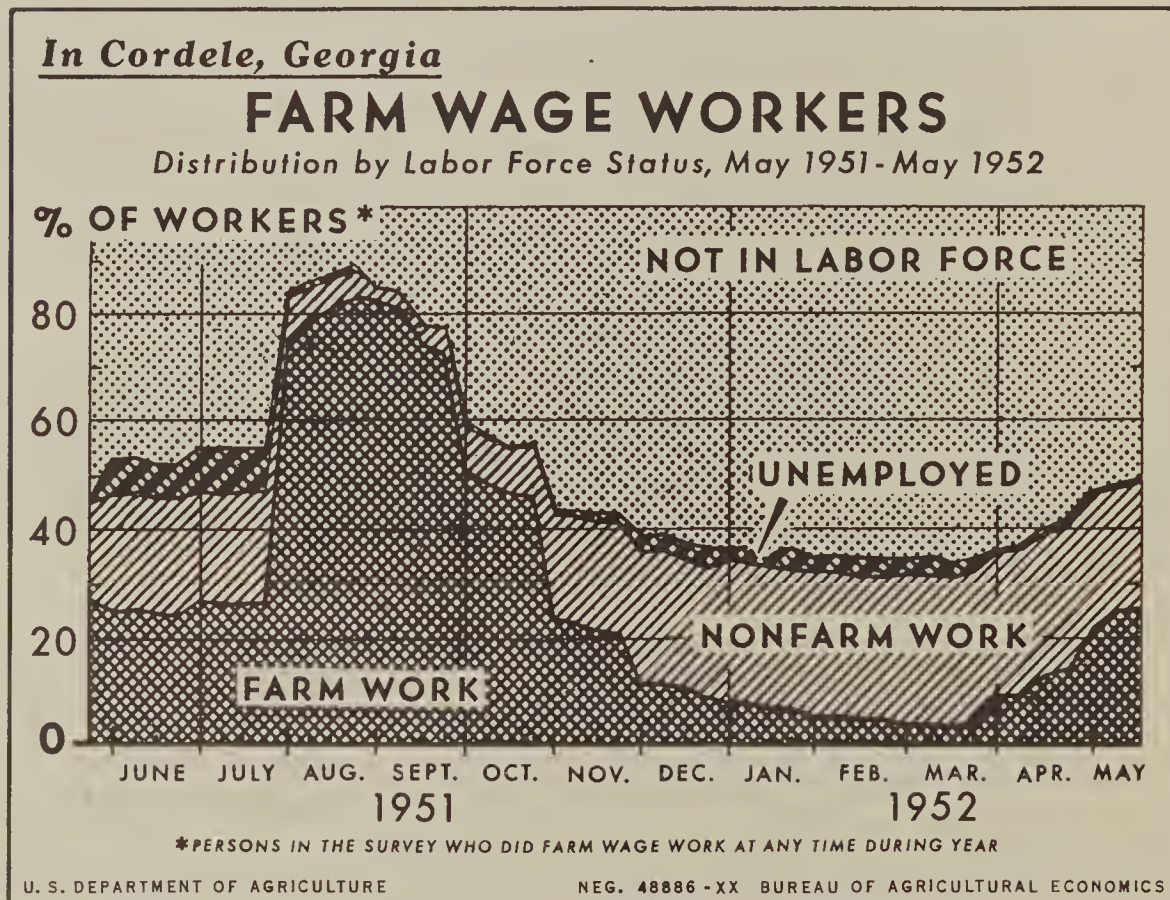


Chart 2

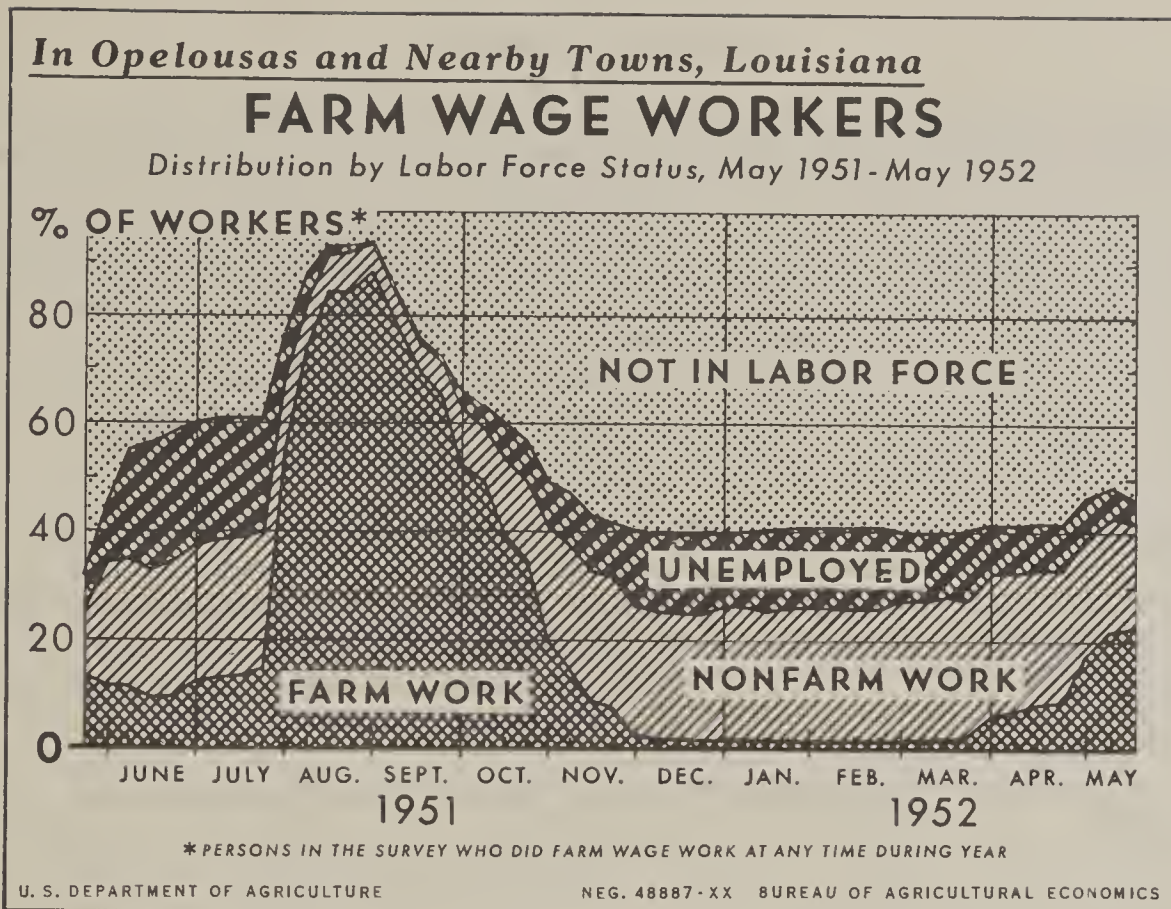


Chart 3

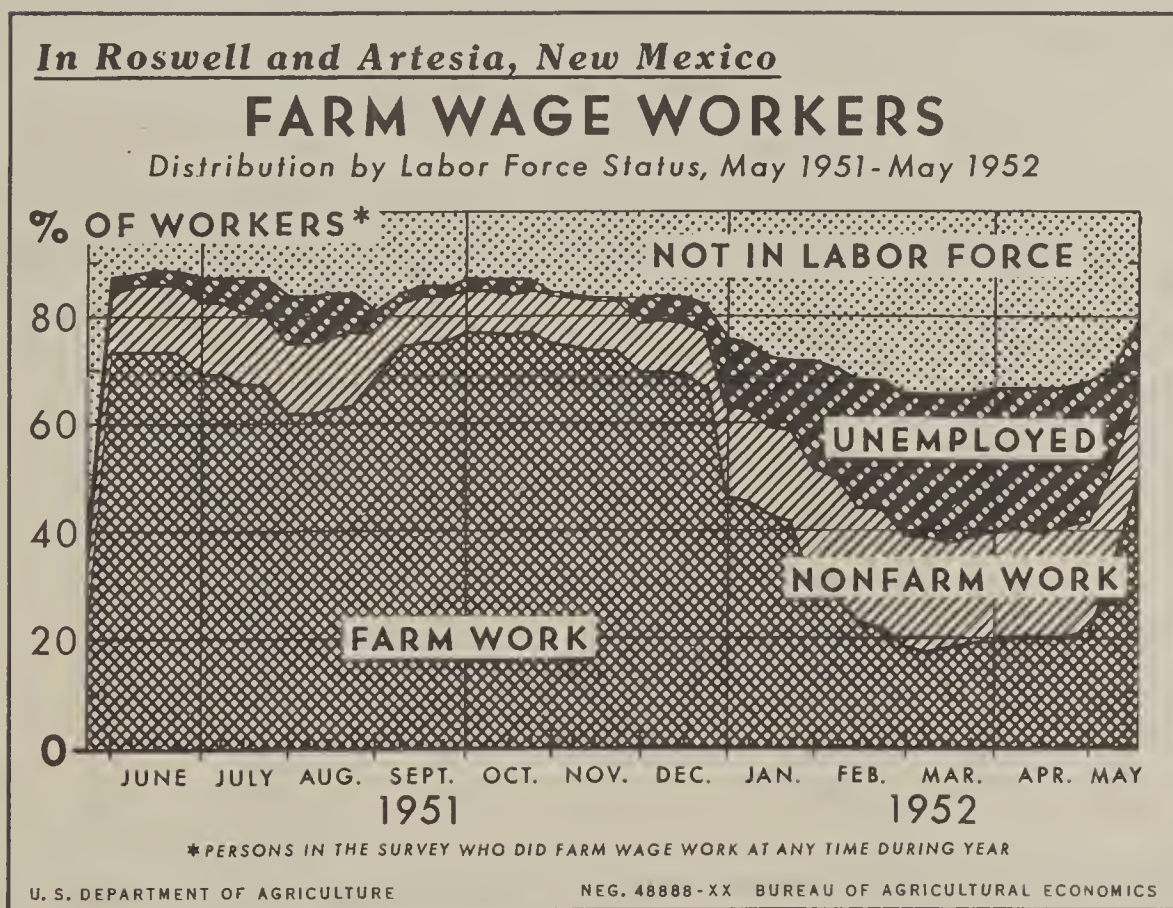


Chart 4

UNEMPLOYMENT

To measure the degree of unemployment among the survey group, each worker interviewed was asked to recall what he did during each week in the year preceding the time of the interview. Persons were described as being in the labor force in any given week if they reported: (a) that they had worked during a given week, or (b) that they were actively seeking work or, (c) that they wanted to work but believed no work was available. Of those who were in the labor force, those who were either seeking work or who believed no work available were classified as unemployed. ^{1/} The rate of unemployment is the percentage of persons unemployed to the total number in the labor force for a given week. Thus, in referring to unemployed persons, those who were in school, keeping house, voluntarily idle or sick are not included.

Unemployment rates were markedly different among the individual workers as well as among the areas in which they resided (table 8). Unemployment was least prevalent in the Georgia area; Cordele has a variety of non-agricultural industries and employment opportunities there for adult laborers were good. Accordingly, only 11 percent of the farm workers interviewed there were unemployed at some time during the preceding year.

The other extreme in unemployment was found in New Mexico, where almost half of the farm workers interviewed were unemployed at some time during the preceding year, most of them for 9 weeks or more. The New Mexico area has very high seasonal peaks in agriculture, and between seasons few nonfarm employment opportunities were available for farm workers.

Table 8.—Percent distribution of farm wage workers in farm-laborer households surveyed in selected localities, by sex, and by weeks of unemployment in past year, May 1952

Locality and sex	Farm workers	Farm workers who were unemployed:					
		At any time	1-4 weeks	5-8 weeks	9-16 weeks	17-24 weeks	25 weeks or more
	Number	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Survey area of:							
<u>Arkansas</u>	349	27	11	7	4	4	1
Male	105	48	20	13	9	5	1
Female	244	18	7	4	3	3	1
<u>Georgia</u>	354	11	2	6	1	1	1
Male	122	15	3	9	1	2	0
Female	232	10	1	5	1	1	2
<u>Louisiana</u>	391	36	7	9	7	4	9
Male	171	55	12	13	10	7	13
Female	220	21	3	4	6	2	6
<u>New Mexico</u>	165	46	10	7	19	8	2
Male	108	59	13	9	24	10	3
Female	57	21	5	2	10	4	0

In the Louisiana area slightly more than one-third of the farm workers were unemployed at some time during the year, most of these also for a total of two months or more. In Arkansas, about one-fourth were unemployed at some time, but their aggregate periods of unemployment were usually short.

^{1/} This concept of unemployment follows that used by the Bureau of the Census for measurement of national unemployment. Its use among the survey group presented certain problems because of the fluid nature of employment in seasonal agriculture. Many of the persons interviewed were women with household responsibilities. Although they normally work in agriculture to supplement family incomes during peak seasons, some were not always able to say precisely whether they were or were not seeking employment during other seasons. Some of the persons about whom information was gathered were school age boys or girls, who may have worked a few hours a week after school or on Saturdays during peak seasons.

Sex and Age

In all four areas, unemployment was more widespread among male farm workers than among female farm workers. Altogether about half or more of the male farm workers in all areas except Georgia were unemployed at some time during the year, but in no area were more than 21 percent of the women unemployed. If the women interviewed had been in the labor market as continuously throughout the year as the men, the unemployment rate for all women would be much higher than it was.

The data do not show any significant variation in unemployment among the different age groups, except for women workers in all four areas. Unemployment was heaviest among women under 24 years of age. These women in the younger age groups generally are in the labor force more regularly than older women; the latter frequently have family responsibilities that tend to keep them from seeking outside employment.

Seasonality of Unemployment

Although the national average unemployment rate for farm laborers and foremen, as reported by the Census Bureau, averaged only 2.1 percent for the year 1951, this survey shows unemployment rates ranging as high as 41.7 percent in some seasons of the year (table 9). Generally, rates of unemployment followed closely the seasonal patterns of the crops in the four areas studied.

In the Arkansas area, unemployment was very low in May, June, and early July, when cotton chopping was in full swing, but rose in August, during the period when cotton is laid by, between chopping and picking times. After the beginning of picking in September, unemployment was almost non-existent until the last half of December, at completion of harvest. Beginning in December, however, unemployment rates rose steadily and amounted to approximately one-fourth of the labor force from February through April. The percentage of unemployed did not fall significantly until the second week in May, when a new cotton-chopping season opened.

Table 9.—Distribution of unemployment rates of farm workers in farm-laborer households surveyed in selected localities, as a percentage of the number of workers in the labor force, by months (average of four weeks), for the year preceding May 1952 ^{1/}

Month	Survey area of:			
	Arkansas	Georgia	Louisiana	New Mexico
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Percent</u>
June 1951	1.3	12.4	36.5	2.9
July	4.3	13.2	36.2	6.9
August	29.5	0.7	4.8	9.7
September	2.4	--	1.2	3.0
October	0.4	0.5	8.6	2.3
November	0.4	4.5	20.9	0.7
December	4.9	7.4	35.8	6.0
January 1952	17.6	8.3	35.7	17.3
February	26.3	7.7	34.6	31.7
March	26.2	8.1	31.1	41.7
April	24.7	3.2	20.9	39.8
May	15.4	1.6	13.3	26.0

^{1/} These unemployment rates differ from those shown in charts 1 to 4 where the unemployed were shown as a percentage of persons in the labor force at any time during the 12-month period. In this table the unemployed for each month are shown as a percentage of persons in the labor force in the specified month (average of four weeks).

In the Georgia area, where cotton accounts for heaviest volume of seasonal work, the pattern of unemployment was similar to that in Arkansas; however, Cordele is farther south than Pine Bluff, and the seasonal peaks in chopping and picking come earlier. Unemployment was heaviest for the Georgia workers in June and July; probably because this is not only the period between chopping and picking times, but also a time when large numbers of teen-age and younger school children on summer vacation are looking for work. The proportion of young people among the farm workers in Georgia was especially high. Even during this period of peak unemployment, however, only 12 to 14 percent of the Cordele farm labor force was unemployed.

With the beginning of the cotton harvest in August, unemployment dropped to 1 percent and remained close to zero for three months. As harvest activity tapered off in November, unemployment rose and through the winter months remained at a level ranging from 4 to 8 percent.

The proportion of workers without jobs in Louisiana was heavy throughout the year except during the cotton harvest in August, September, and part of October. All during December, January, February, and March, approximately one-third of the labor force was unemployed. Again in July, about one-fourth of the workers were without work.

Seasonal patterns of unemployment in New Mexico differed greatly from those in the other areas. Some unemployment was reported throughout the year, but from January through May, it was very heavy and accounted for about 40 percent of the labor force during March and April. In June and the first half of July, this area's cotton-chopping season, unemployment was not more than 5 percent, but between chopping and the beginning of cotton harvest in September, up to 10 percent of the workers were unemployed.

AVAILABILITY FOR OFF-SEASON EMPLOYMENT

It is evident from the extent of unemployment among the farm wage workers surveyed in each of the four areas that organized efforts are needed to extend the continuity of employment among those willing to accept off-season jobs. In order to determine what can be done in planning for this group, all workers 16 to 60 years of age were asked how long they expected to work during the following year. Those who expected to work 10 to 12 months and those from whom no response was obtained were not questioned about their availability for employment during the coming year. Those workers who were uncertain about their plans and those who expected to work for less than 10 months were asked whether they would accept local farm or nonfarm jobs during the next year. They were then questioned about their willingness to accept non-local farm jobs. Finally, these workers were asked to indicate the seasons of the year during which they expected to be available for employment.

Of the 974 farm workers, aged 16 to 60, in the four survey areas, more than a third expected to be working for at least 10 months during the year to come (table 10). This proportion varied from a low of 26 percent in Arkansas to 41 percent in Louisiana. In each of the areas, relatively more men than women expected to be employed for this length of time. An additional 8 percent of the workers, ranging from 6 to 10 percent in individual areas, failed to respond to the question of employment expectation. These two groups were then eliminated from further questioning about availability during the coming year.

For the remaining 553 workers, who expected to work for 0 to 9 months or for an unknown number of months, information on willingness to accept off-season jobs was collected. Two hundred and seventy of these workers said they would take off-season jobs during the coming year.

Table 10.—Farm workers aged 16-60 in survey households by employment expectations and availability for off-season farm and nonfarm work during the coming year, by sex of worker, May 1952

Work expectations and availability	Farm workers aged 16-60		
	All workers	Male	Female
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Number</u>
<u>Work expectations, 1952-53</u>			
Total farm workers, 16-60	974	350	624
Expect to work 10-12 months	344	177	167
Expect to work 0-9 months <u>1/</u>	553	139	414
No response	77	34	43
<u>Off-season availability</u>			
Total workers questioned	553	139	414
Workers available for: <u>2/</u>			
Local farm work	270	79	191
Local nonfarm work	284	92	192
Nonlocal farm work	45	23	22

1/ Includes 116 workers who were uncertain of their work plans for the coming year.

2/ Duplicated figures as some workers are available for more than one category of work.

Table 11.—Farm workers, 1/ aged 16-60, in survey household who do not expect to work regularly during the coming year, and who were questioned about their availability, by reported availability for off-season farm and nonfarm work, by calendar quarter, by type of work and survey areas, May 1952

	Farm workers, 16-60 <u>2/</u>			
	Pine Bluff, Arkansas	Cordele, Georgia	Opelousas, Louisiana	Roswell-Artesia, New Mexico
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Number</u>
Farm workers <u>1/</u> 16-60	201	119	152	81
Available:				
<u>Some time during year</u>				
Local farm	112	45	70	43
Local nonfarm	98	61	75	50
Nonlocal farm	13	7	9	16
<u>January-March</u>				
Local farm	64	24	22	38
Local nonfarm	79	40	41	41
Nonlocal farm	3	4	5	11
<u>April-June</u>				
Local farm	74	31	43	36
Local nonfarm	58	49	37	41
Nonlocal farm	5	3	6	10
<u>July-September</u>				
Local farm	105	35	43	13
Local nonfarm	77	47	40	8
Nonlocal farm	13	4	4	6
<u>October-December</u>				
Local farm	41	28	26	11
Local nonfarm	36	39	48	13
Nonlocal farm	2	6	6	3

1/ This table is confined to the 553 workers who were specifically questioned regarding their availability.

2/ Duplicated figures as some workers are available for more than one category of work and more than one quarter of the year.

In the Arkansas and New Mexico areas, about one-half of the workers questioned on availability indicated that they would accept a local farm or nonfarm job during off-seasons (table 11). The workers of the Georgia sample were least interested in farm jobs, with only 45 of the 119 workers questioned reporting availability for such work.

In all of the areas except Arkansas, more workers were willing to accept local nonfarm work than local farm work, indicating that nonfarm work has a greater attraction than farm work even among persons with a background of experience in farm work. Survey findings point to the fact that the size of the seasonal farm labor supply will vary significantly according to general economic conditions; if nonfarm job openings exist, most local workers will take these in preference to farm jobs.

Workers available for off-season local jobs were more likely to be secondary workers in households rather than heads of families, as family heads generally had more stable employment through the year. In each of the sample areas, male workers reported a definite preference for local nonfarm work as compared with farm work, but the proportion of women workers available for the two types of work varied according to area. In two of the four areas surveyed, Georgia and New Mexico, women questioned about availability preferred nonfarm jobs. In Opelousas, preferences for farm and nonfarm work were equal, while in Pine Bluff there were more women who said they would be willing to take farm jobs during their off-season periods than nonfarm jobs. That there was no stronger preference shown by women for nonfarm employment may have been due to the type of nonfarm jobs open to them in the survey areas. These consisted mainly of service work in homes, laundries and restaurants—usually at comparatively low wages.

Non-local Work

The overwhelming majority of workers preferred not to accept farm jobs which would involve moving away from home (table 11). The extremely low proportion of workers willing to take nonlocal farm work, however, may understate the actual situation regarding availability for out-of-area farm employment, since the question on this subject had to be framed very generally, and specific details on nonlocal employment could not be presented to the respondents. It is probable that more workers would consider jobs in other counties or States if they had further details regarding conditions of nonlocal farm employment. Favorable wages and working conditions might induce some workers to move who stated in this survey that they would not move.

A fairly large group among the farm workers interviewed, as pointed out earlier, were housewives or other women with family responsibilities who were not free to leave, but probably there were many others who, even though they might be free to move, preferred not to do so for other reasons.

Except in New Mexico, the areas surveyed do not use much migratory labor and have not traditionally supplied migratory labor for other areas. The workers in each of the towns studied had comparatively strong ties in the community which limited their mobility. Therefore, it could not be expected that large numbers of them would readily accept farm work of an unknown nature away from their home areas.

Seasonal Patterns of Availability in Each Area

About one-half of the workers questioned in Pine Bluff were reported to be available for local farm or nonfarm work at some time during the year following the date of the interview. Most of these were women. The number available for nonlocal farm jobs during off-seasons was almost negligible. The highest number who were willing to accept jobs was reported for the July-September quarter. This is the quarter in which unemployment was also reportedly high, as crops are laid by in August. Approximately one-fourth to one-third of all the workers questioned expected to be available for local jobs at some time during the January-June period. This also coincides

closely with the relatively severe unemployment rates experienced in February, March and April (see table 9).

Because of the relative prosperity of Cordele, Georgia, as compared with the other areas studied, the number of workers who reported themselves willing to take off-season jobs at some time during the year was comparatively low. Forty-five were available for local farm work and 61 for local nonfarm work. Only 7 were willing to migrate elsewhere for a farm job. Most of those who said they wanted work at some time during the year were women, since most men in this area were employed year-round. Not one male in the 16-60 age group responded that he would be willing to take a nonlocal farm job at any time during the year. More workers of both sexes were available for jobs during the second and third calendar quarters than during other periods. These quarters include the months of June and July when unemployment was highest in Cordele.

Almost one-half of the Louisiana workers who were questioned about availability were reported to be willing to take a local job when not otherwise employed at some time during the following year. Unlike the other areas surveyed, many males as well as females said they would accept supplementary seasonal employment. Only 9 of the 152 workers questioned were interested in nonlocal employment.

The group of workers surveyed in Artesia and Roswell, New Mexico, differed markedly from those of the other three areas in willingness to accept employment. Because of the high percentage of male heads of families in the New Mexico sample, males comprised the majority of workers aged 16-60 who would accept off-season work. Furthermore, 16 of the 81 workers questioned were willing to work in areas other than their local one; this reflects a more mobile type of workers than in the other survey areas. Employment histories of the farm workers interviewed showed that between seasonal peaks in cotton chopping and harvesting, many migrated to other areas in search of work. A considerable number of the workers available for work at some time during the year were interested in obtaining employment during the first half of the year. This is the period in which unemployment is highest.

Availability of Nonfarm Workers

In the farm-laborer households visited, there were 330 workers who had worked at nonfarm jobs only during the year preceding May 1952. These workers were asked whether they had had periods of unemployment during the past year and if they would have taken a farm job while idle. The majority of the nonfarm workers had had steady employment throughout the year. Among those with periods of unemployment who replied to the question, only one-fourth would have taken a farm job. There was a definite tendency to prefer to work in their own county, though some were willing to work in another county of the same State. Almost none was willing to go outside the State.

METHODOLOGY OF THE SURVEY

The four areas covered in this survey were selected by the Department of Labor as appropriate for this type of survey. Only urban places and villages within these areas were chosen for actual interviewing, since the study's focus was to be on the off-farm supply of seasonal labor for farm work rather than on the labor supply resident on farms or in the open country. The local offices of the State Employment Services assisted in indicating the particular towns and sections of towns where there were concentrations of worker residences. An attempt was made to reflect the situation of different types of workers in proportion to their numerical importance in the area. For example, in the three Southeastern areas, the seasonal farm workers were almost exclusively Negro, and they usually lived in specific sections of the towns. In such cases, a random sample of blocks was drawn within these particular sections, and all the households in each sample block were contacted.

A household identification sheet was completed for each household visited; this contained screening questions to determine whether or not a schedule was to be taken for the household. Households without farm wage workers and those of farm operators were eliminated at this stage of the survey. The remaining non-operator households having at least one farm wage worker were then interviewed. Two schedules were used, one for household heads and one for other persons in the household who did farm wage work in the past 12 months.

Sampling rates were designed to yield approximately 200 households containing one or more seasonal farm workers in each of the four survey areas. As can be seen from table 12, the New Mexico area yielded a smaller number of scheduled households than the other three areas in spite of its much larger number of total households visited. The worker population of Roswell-Artesia was more heterogeneous and their dwellings more widely dispersed than those of the other areas. This increased the difficulty of finding farm worker households.

In the four areas surveyed, 3,164 households were visited. These were located in the sections of towns and villages where there were relatively large numbers of hired farm workers. As the focus of the study was to be on hired workers rather than on farm operators, a few households of farm operators living in these urban places were eliminated from the survey. Most of the other households excluded were those having no farm wage workers, although there were also a few which could not be interviewed. The remaining 695 households, forming the nucleus of this study, were surveyed in detail. These were non-operator households containing one or more persons who had done some farm work for wages in the preceding 12 months.

Table 12.—Worker composition of farm-laborer households surveyed in specified localities, May 1952

Locality	Households interviewed	Population in these households	Workers in households	Percentage of household members who worked in preceding 12 months	Workers per household
	Number	Number	Number	Percent	Number
Total workers	695	3,204	1,589	50	2.3
Survey area of:					
Arkansas					
Pine Bluff (Jefferson County)	204	821	435	53	2.1
Georgia					
Cordele (Crisp County)	189	826	480	58	2.5
Louisiana					
Opelousas, Ville Platte, Eunice, Washington and several villages (St. Landry and Evangeline Parishes)	210	1,081	493	46	2.3
New Mexico					
Roswell (Chaves County)					
Artesia (Eddy County)	92	476	181	38	2.0

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